

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

Friday, May 15, 2009

Action to Increase Federal Funds for Wyoming Rural Health Clinics

Recent approval of a request by Governor Dave Freudenthal will mean an increase in federal funds for certain rural health clinics in Wyoming and opportunities to strengthen rural health recruitment efforts.

“Much of Wyoming faces a significant shortage of physicians and other primary care health professionals,” the Governor said. “We need to pursue every avenue to increase access to care and expand the availability of federal funding in these areas.”

Freudenthal requested a “Governor’s Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA)” designation for Wyoming from the federal government. HPSAs are counties, partial counties or communities that, by federal definition, have too few primary care providers for the populations they serve.

The HPSA approval makes it easier for certain areas of Wyoming to qualify for federal Rural Health Clinic status. Rural Health Clinics increase primary care services for Medicaid, Medicare and other patients in rural, underserved communities. The clinics can be public, private or non-profit organizations.

Sharla Allen, Office of Rural Health manager with the Wyoming Department of Health, said “The main advantage of Rural Health Clinic status is higher reimbursement rates for providing Medicaid and Medicare services in rural areas. Better rates can help attract more providers to serve our state’s older citizens and residents with lower incomes.”

With the new HPSA designation, new areas in Wyoming that are now eligible to obtain Rural Health Clinic status include Albany County, northern Campbell County, Crook County, Uinta County, Fremont County, northern Lincoln County and Sheridan County. “Without the governor’s HPSA designation, these areas could not meet the federal requirements,” she explained.

Many areas of Wyoming were already qualified for the federal designation, including: Big Horn, Carbon, Converse, Crook, Goshen, Hot Springs, Niobrara, Platte, Sublette, Sweetwater, Washakie and Weston counties; southern Campbell County; southern Johnson County; northwest Fremont County, including the Wind River Indian Reservation; southern Lincoln County; parts of south Cheyenne; parts of central Casper; Meeteetse; Rock River; Pine Bluffs; and portions of the area in and around Torrington.

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